

A FEW TITLES HAVE BEEN EARNED – NOW FOR THE BEST POSITION IN THE CHAMPIONSHIPS

They say it is not over until the lady has uttered the final notes and this is true about the hard fought battles between teams competing in the Production Vehicle category of the 2019 South African National Cross Country Series (SACCS). And while some titles received owners after the recent fifth round of the championship in Lichtenburg, there is still plenty to fight for at the sixth and final round of the series that will take place on 1 and 2 November in Parys.

It's all about championship titles and victories for competitors and teams in the SACCS, but it is also about fighting until the end and making their teams proud with more good results. The final round of the series will not only see those who have already earned their titles, going for gold again, but it will be the final chance for teams to finish the season on a high and move into the best possible position in the standings.

After the dust had settled in Lichtenburg where the fifth and penultimate round of the SACCS took place, the champagne corks popped as it became clear that some championship titles had been settled. Henk Lategan/Brett Cummings (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA) became the youngest pairing ever to clinch the FIA Class championship as well as the overall SACCS championship title, but they will still be aiming for a fourth victory of the season.

Looking at the overall standings Lategan/Cummings (136 points) are safe, but the final two steps of the 2019 podium can still change. After a consistent season, Lance Woolridge/Ward Huxtable (Ford Castrol Cross Country Team) successfully defended their Class T title and are currently second on the overall standings. They will, however, have to keep a close eye on outgoing overall champions, Giniel de Villiers/Dennis Murphy (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA) who are only five points in arrears and can still finish as the overall runners-up. Shameer Variawa/Juan Möhr (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux) are currently fourth (79 points) and the Ford team might be under pressure as a complete Toyota Gazoo Racing SA podium will be just what the team would want.

Variawa will be under pressure from Chris Visser (Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux) who trails him by a slender three points. From fourth place, things are looking a bit different in the overall Drivers and Navigators Championships as competitors swapped seats and racing overalls. In the overall Drivers Championship, Johan Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux) is the second Class T driver and has the same amount of points (48) as another Class T driver, Gareth Woolridge (Ford Castrol Cross Country Team). With Gareth not likely to make another appearance this season, Johan will be under pressure from Jacques van Tonder (Class T Ford Ranger) who trails him by six points. Ernest Roberts (Red-Lined Motorsport Nissan Navara) in the FIA Class and Gary Bertholdt (Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux) in Class T are level pegging on 34 points not too far behind.

A blanket of only 12 points cover Van Tonder in eighth place from Johan van Staden (Elf Renault Duster) in 11th and the current standings might just look a bit different after the final event.

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Boyd Dreyer (56 points), who navigated for Gareth Woolridge at the season opener as well as in Botswana and sat next to Van Tonder at the Lichtenburg 400, is fifth behind Möhr in the overall Navigators Championship and still has a chance of moving up.

Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux) is sixth 14 points clear of Sammy Redelinghuys, who initially read the notes for Van Tonder and then for Wors Prinsloo (Ford Ranger) at Lichtenburg and Geoff Minnitt, Bertholdt's trusted partner, both on 34 points while Danie Stassen (32), rounds off the top 10 after scoring points as Visser's navigator at Bronkhorstspuit and Lichtenburg.

The situation in the various class championships is just as interesting. In the FIA Class, Lategan/Cummings are safe, but Variawa and Visser, both on 126 points, can put second-placed De Villiers (148 points) under pressure in the Driver's Championship as the gap is too small for De Villiers to relax. Roberts (97 points) is fifth and has some breathing space to Van Staden (75 points), but behind Van Staden, Jaco van Dyk (Red-Lined Motorsport Nissan Navara) and Schalk Burger (Schalk Burger Motorsport King Price Extreme) are on equal points and trail him by a single point. Burger will, however, not be competing again before the Dakar Rally 2020.

In the FIA Class Navigators Championship, Möhr (126 points) is third and the only one to put pressure on second-placed Murphy (148 points). Murphy and Möhr have, however, secured a spot on the podium with Riaan Greyling (80 points) in fourth and Elvene Vonk (74 points), who sits next to Burger fifth, one point ahead of recently relocated Phillip Herselman. With the latter not competing in the SACCS anymore and Vonk missing the last event, Mike Lawrenson (62 points), who was Van Staden's regular navigator, stands an outside chance to move into the top five.

With the Woolridge/Huxtable pairing claiming their second consecutive Class T title, they are safe from the pack behind. With competitors scoring five points for starting an event as well as the musical chairs situation, the Class T Drivers Championship also looks somewhat different. Johan Horn (126 points) is second and will be chased by Van Tonder (120 points) while the gap of 30 points might be just too big for Bertholdt (90 points) to claim a final podium this season. Gareth Woolridge (84 points) trails him by six points and is 24 points ahead of Prinsloo.

The rest of the drivers might be somewhat further behind, but only seven points cover Bernard Johnstone (Toyota Hilux) in 11th place from Theuns Joubert (Elf Renault Duster) in seventh place. Richard Leeke swapped his BMW and Ford Ranger for a Red-Lined Motorsport Nissan at Lichtenburg and competed in the FIA Class. He has one point less than Joubert in Class T and has the same amount of points in the bag as Jason Venter (4x4 Mega World ARB Toyota Hilux) who won Class T at the Lichtenburg 400. Venter's brother and team-mate, Dylan trails him by three points and is three points ahead of Johnstone.

In the Class T Navigators Championship Werner Horn (126 points) is currently second and the team cannot afford to put a foot wrong as both Redelinghuys (105 points) and Dreyer (104 points) stand an outside chance of catching him. It is safe to say there will be a terrific battle for the final podium spot. Minnitt (90 points) is safe in fourth place as Kenneth Venter (40 points), who read the notes for Prinsloo at the Winterton 400 and the TDR 1000, is somewhat further behind. Jason Venter's navigator, Jaco van Aardt, can overtake Kenneth as he is only five points behind having scored healthy points after winning the class at Lichtenburg.

Johnstone's wife, Minette (29 points) rounds off the top 10, but she can also move up the leader board as Donovan Lubbe (32 points) and Henry Köhne (31 points) only scored points in Botswana.

Defending Class S champions, David Huddy and Gerhard Schutte (Hud Racing Nissan Navara) are the undisputable champions having won their class at each and every event this year. They earned their title for the second consecutive year. Jannie/Pieter Visser (Toyota Hilux) are second with Archie/Kent Rutherford third.

Toyota (507,5 points) lead the Manufacturers Championship ahead of Ford (225 points) and Nissan (141 points) while Renault (33 points) and CR (4 points) rounds off the top five.

The SACCS battles will continue at Parys when the sixth and final round takes place on 1 and 2 November 2019.

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